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ABSTRACT

Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) are incorporated organizations and groups whose mission is to facilitate local partnerships for the purpose of improving young people's education and training outcomes in Australia. LLENs are supported by grants from Australia's Department of Education and Training. Of the 31 LLENs currently existing throughout the state of Victoria, 15 were established in early 2001 and 16 were established in late 2001. In its first 18 months, the Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley LLEN (M&MV LLEN) established a strong network of education and training providers, community organizations, employment agencies, and employer groups that are working together to create an improved learning environment for young people of postcompulsory school age. The M&MV LLEN's strategic plan is underpinned by current research on the following topics: youth at risk; employment opportunities; destination and transition data; retention rates; and alternative programs to Victorian Certificate of Education. One area of particular concern to the M&MV LLEN has been the learning pathways of refugee and migrant youth. The M&MV LLEN aspires to effecting change that will address shortcomings in education and training, provide young people with a range of programs that establish a pathway to a fulfilling adult life, and assist employers to respond to the emerging trends in their industries. (MN)

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The LLEN: The Purpose of Local Partnerships in the Provision of Improved Outcomes for Young People

Sue Fowler

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much needed as we're losing too many, particularly the young ones. We have to listen to them more and pull together to get them feeling better about all sorts of issues in their lives. We also have to give them strong wise people who can give the feedback and direction when it's needed"

The CALP will work with each participant to engage mentors and other supports to further dreams and plans for employment, education and training, health and well being. These actions are recorded through the MIPP planning and review process.

LEARNING RESOURCES

Learning resources are being completed to assist delivery. They include a document titled *'Getting It Together'* which advises on implementation planning for delivery. Again consultations stressed the need for planning to ensure programs do represent the community and participants' needs and dreams, as well as providing the practical supports required for quality delivery.

'Getting It Together' is not prescriptive but it does provide strong guidelines to assist each community build its program for a long life and in the best interests of its participants. The document stresses MIPP development, induction for students, mentor training for the CALP and professional development prior to program delivery.

THE NEXT STAGE

The Coorong Tongala pilots will commence in 2003.

There will be regular updates on pilots, stories and learning along the way. Swinburne University of Technology will remain the point of contact for the roll out of the new curriculum and will support the pilot stage. The team will be working with its existing Indigenous and non-Indigenous team members, including Aunty Dot Peters and the peak bodies mentioned throughout to ensure quality and sustainable delivery.

The pilots will be engaged in case studying their experiences for their peers to follow them, so they may guide future programs and professional development.

Those of you interested in discussing the Coorong Tongala further can contact Sharon Rice, Manager of Regional Learning Networks, Swinburne University of Technology, TAFE on (03) 9213 6846.

The LLEN: the purpose of local partnerships in the provision of improved outcomes for young people

*By **Sue Fowler**, Executive Officer, Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley Local Learning and Employment Network*

A key role of the Local Learning and Employment Networks is the facilitation of local partnerships. Local partnerships can provide us with information about their services for young people, and it is through this knowledge and their experience that existing programs and services can be extended and/or modified to better meet the needs of young people. The LLEN is therefore a group of members and their associated organisations. This, however, is not the end product – it is a means to an end – the information gathered can only tell us what is working and where the gaps are. Once disparities have been identified we need to explore the mechanisms that may have created the gap and any barriers that have prevented resolution. We must look at models and establish frameworks that stand alone as good practice in the provision of specific skills, whilst also developing a full range of abilities in each student. The LLEN needs to constantly ask *what do we need to do so that we provide positive outcomes for all young people?* This is fundamental to our success.

The LLEN therefore needs to support organisations to coordinate their activities so that young people have a good knowledge of what is available to them and have access to, and the opportunity to choose between, a range of programs in education and training that are relevant to the needs of the young person. Such programs may be offered at secondary schools, TAFE institutes, ACE providers, at work or with private providers. As a community we need to secure a commitment to youth. Organisations must look at the strategies needed to do this, not in isolation of other sectors or agencies, but rather as a tight-knit integrated system with connections that provide easy transition from one sector to the other.

BACKGROUND

Currently there are 31 Local Learning and Employment Networks that cover the state of Victoria, 15 having been established early 2001 and another 16 in late 2001. The Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley LLEN (M & MV LLEN) has now been incorporated for approximately 18 months and in that time has established a strong network of education and training providers, community organisations, employment agencies and employer groups that are working together to create an improved learning environment for young people of post compulsory age (over 15 years old).

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WHAT IS A LLEN?

The LLENs are incorporated organisations that receive a grant from the Department of Education and Training. This differs from LLEN to LLEN. We are accountable to the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission (VLESC) and are governed by a Committee of Management representing twenty organisations from our local region. Staffing of the LLENs varies and generally they have two-three people working in the office.

Importantly the M & MV LLEN is not a service agency or a funding body – rather it is the members working together to build on each others' programs and experience by gaining a better understanding of the needs of young people and employers, and the local and global context in which we are now operating. The organisations within the LLEN need to work collaboratively with all levels of government to advise on a policy framework that will enable them to establish models of education and training that work well to give young people the skills they need to participate in their communities and at work.

CONTEXT

No group of post-compulsory young people form a homogenous cohort. It is therefore essential that the education and training framework reflects the diversity of needs and learning styles practised by these young people. The Curriculum Standards Frameworks and Victorian Certificate of Education cater to a good proportion of our students and are broadly accepted throughout the community. Many students progress through the various stages of our traditional curriculum without too many problems. They are confident in having a go and are resilient in the face of adversity, overcoming the barriers they encounter along the way. School retention rates have risen from 35 per cent in 1981 to more than double that now. During this time the youth labour market has collapsed and new technologies have produced a greater need for increased flexibility from those entering the work force. Today, young people need to be equipped with a range of quite different skills than those of twenty to thirty years ago.

For some young people life is not so easy. They endure failure from an early age, finding it difficult to acquire the skills and flexibility to participate in education, social and work activities. For these young people getting off the treadmill that is spiralling towards unemployment and economic despair is challenging. It is also challenging for the providers of education and training programs, employers and government bodies dealing with developing policies and programs that will assist these young people. The personal, social and economic benefits to all stakeholders are well documented. In a recent paper prepared by John Spierings, for the LLENs, he states that the long term disadvantages, as tracked by ACER's Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth study, are reflected in higher rates of unemployment, lower incomes and other risks to well-being, at an estimated cost by NATSEM of $2.6 billion every year (NATSEM and DSF, *The cost to Australia of Early School-Leaving*, DSF, Sydney 1999).

Debra Tyler (Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, 2002) drawing on research completed for both the State Government of Victoria (*Planning the Future: The Evaluation of Phase One of the Pathways Project in Victoria*, DEET, 2001) and the Commonwealth Government (*Building Relationships: Making Education Work*, DETYA, 2001), states that "overwhelmingly, the reasons stated by young people for disengagement from the schooling system were located within school-related areas." Young people want school programs to be relevant, negotiable and flexible, and teachers who can relate well to students.

Young people leaving school prior to completing year 12 are at a much greater risk of not finding appropriate work, or not continuing in some form of education and training. But for some staying on at school is not an option. Richard Teese (*Early Leaving in Victoria Geographical Patterns, Origins and Strategic Issues*, Richard Teese, 2002) states that young people leave school early primarily for two reasons – they want to work or they lack interest in the current school curriculum. Young people want their education to be relevant and manageable. Different models that cater to young people who need or want to work part time must be considered. We must look at how all programs can provide the education needs for vocational, academic and social learning. Educational programs and structures must explore ways of offering curriculum that includes individualised programs in literacy, numeracy, language and employability skills, integrating these with life experiences.

THE LLEN ROLE

The M & MV LLEN has established its direction through the development of its strategic plan. Underpinning the strategic plan is the current research on

- youth at risk,
- employment opportunities,
- destination and transition data,
- retention rates from both year 7 to 12 and between each year, and
- alternative programs to the VCE.

The strategic plan, available on our web site (www.mmvllen.org.au), will be reviewed to monitor our progress towards our goals and re-focus where necessary.

Our day to day activities vary enormously. Sub-committees meet to critically examine our existing projects and determine what new projects will help us achieve our aims. Once a program has the approval of the LLEN Committee of Management, a reference group or working party is formed from the broader community. One sub-committee, in response to a need for creating meaningful relationships for young people, has implemented a pilot mentoring project in one of our schools. The project, through the provision of a one-one relationship, aims to assist young people identify their personal goals and how they can go about achieving these. Based on a similar project on the North Coast of NSW, all mentors undergo training and are supported by a project officer. An evaluation of the project will assist the LLEN to shift focus where necessary and move the project forward to other schools or programs.

This same sub-committee is now exploring how we can assist

schools provide pathways planning for young people who have disabilities and face hardship on entering the workforce. Connection to further study and employers who are sympathetic to the issues of people with disabilities is important and the LLEN will help link schools to such groups.

Another sub-committee has implemented a project that aims to assist young people develop personal skills and build self-esteem by helping them acknowledge the skills they are using and learning in out of school activities. These activities include a young persons program at Footscray Arts and Community Centre in Drama, FREEZA programs as run by our local councils, and a Drug and Alcohol Awareness program, also run by the local council. The young people involved have been able to document their skills on a digital portfolio. The project has the potential to create strong links to the community and will be available for use by schools as part of a personal development program.

Of major concern to the community in our region are the learning pathways of young refugee and migrant youth. Through consultation with the communities, school staff and relevant organisations we will determine how we may assist young people and their families develop both the social learning and language skills they require to participate in their community and access education, training and employment. Our challenge will be to develop an understanding of the range of services and programs that meet the needs of NESB young people as well as developing strategies to inform the policy debate.

Peter Kirby in the Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training identified that stronger links were needed between education, training and industry. The M & MV LLEN understands that education and training must reflect the complex needs of industry and young people. Vocational training alone is not sufficient. We have discussed the needs and opportunities with various industries and have commissioned a study to examine the skill sets required by different occupations within industries and the industry trends for our region. Based on firm evidence we will work with education and training organisations so that they can implement programs that will provide young people with the skills and knowledge they need to move into meaningful work.

The LLEN has been active in supporting the new Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), School Based Apprenticeships, Full time Apprenticeships, and alternative courses that seek to address some of the entrenched problems around low retention and completion rates and high absenteeism.

The LLEN is also concerned that some young people moving out of school encounter too many difficulties in the transition phase between school and further education or employment. In many cases they do not have the confidence and knowledge to deal with these issues alone. For all young people leaving school to find work their first experience is crucial. John Spierings quotes an ACER report: "young people who do not experience full time employment in their first year after leaving school spend substantially less time in work over their first five years than those who are employed full time in their first year." *(Make your own way there. An agenda for young people in the modern labour market. Paper for ALNARC – John Spierings DSF, March 2002)*. The M & MV LLEN is working with the support services so that young people are referred appropriately to them, receive the assistance they require and have supported referral where necessary.

We also need to ensure that our approach in assisting young people make the transition from school to work successful reflects the reasons why young people are leaving schools. Those moving from successful VCE to tertiary education will have very different needs to those who leave at year 10.

For those who are unsuccessful at school, there needs to be alternative pathways with multiple chances for re-entry to education and training. The programs must provide young people with the necessary skills, whilst developing their self-confidence and ability to cope with change. The LLEN is further investigating a range of literacy and numeracy programs that may assist young people attain these skills in schools or with other providers. Systems and structures need to reflect principles that will provide young people with the employability and life-long learning skills they need.

For young people wanting to find work, we need to ensure that well informed career guidance exists, as well as promoting all options as worthwhile. The LLEN can help employers and careers teachers gain a comprehensive overview of different career paths highlighting industry expectations, opportunities and eligibility to support.

In summary the M & MV LLEN aspires to effecting change that will address shortcomings in education and training, provide young people with a range of programs that establish a pathway to a fulfilling adult life, and assist employers to respond to the emerging trends in their industries.

For more information on the activities of the M & MV LLEN visit their website at www.mmvllen.org.au

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